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## **The Vermont Marble Company Strike of 1935 - 1936**



RUTLAND HERALD

*An angry mob of pickets confronted Roy Spear when he attempted to pass trucks through the picket lines at West Rutland. Roy Spear is in the center wearing a soft hat and carrying a machine gun.*

## About the Authors

During his senior year at Castleton State College, Douglas S. Lertola, nephew of Mary H. Fregosi, wrote a paper on the 1935-1936 Vermont Marble Company strike. In 2000, Douglas died at a far too young age. His love of history, curiosity, and passion for reading were unmatched by anyone in his family. Had he lived to an old age, he surely would have been the town historian.

Mary H. Fregosi is a retired educator who lives in Proctor. Her father, Geno J. Fregosi, was a stonecutter by trade. He had begun employment at the Vermont Marble Company on 19 July 1922. He retired 29 September 1972. It is little wonder that in 2002 Mary H. Fregosi placed the finishing touches on what was truly a family saga.

## Introduction

The Vermont Marble Company was established in 1880 when Redfield Proctor, Sr. merged the Rutland Marble Company with the Sutherland Falls Company. Between 1889-1890 Proctor bought four small marble companies and built the Clarendon and Pittsford Railroad to access them. Over the next 50 years the company grew into a major business, employing over 1,000 people, and the Proctor family became a dominant force in Vermont politics. There had never been a strike in the 55 years of the Vermont Marble Company's existence save for a small one that had occurred in one shop in 1904.<sup>1</sup> The company acquired additional quarries and properties in these years and also established its own bank, hospital, electrical power station and company store. The company met the social needs of their workers, providing them with a YMCA and social clubs at which their workers could gather.

As the company grew, its work force became more diverse. Italians and eastern Europeans joined Scandinavians. British and Welsh who were among the early ethnic groups employed. In both Rutland and Proctor there were large Italian populations while in West Rutland the Poles, Slavs and Russians took up residence.

Many of the workers lived in company houses, most of which were duplexes. They used Vermont Marble electricity, received attention at the company's hospital when ill or injured and shopped at the company store. Management felt that their workers received a fair wage but on payday the checks reflected the deductions owed the company. During the Depression years those deductions left workers with little in their pay envelopes.

# **The Vermont Marble Company**

## **Strike of 1935-1936**

by Douglas S. Lertola and Mary H. Fregosi

In 1935 the Great Depression was in its sixth year and still clasped an iron-fisted grip on the country despite faint signs of its ebbing. Franklin D. Roosevelt was concluding his first term, Adolph Hitler was planning his conquests, and Benito Mussolini's army was wreaking havoc in Ethiopia. In October of that year 110 men in Danby, Vermont, in a bold move started a strike against one of the largest and certainly most powerful employers in Vermont, The Vermont Marble Company. What motivated these workers to go out on holiday during this depressed time can only be surmised. Some people speculated that the workers were prompted to strike primarily by union leaders who wanted to establish a dominant presence in an industry that had been run by one of the foremost families in Vermont. Whatever the reasons, the strike would unleash an anger and violence never before seen in Rutland County and when it was concluded would alter the lives of many families and their relationships with one another, especially in the communities of West Rutland, Center Rutland and Proctor.

In 1935 the Vermont Marble Company owned and operated several properties around Rutland County and employed over 1,100 men. In mid-October a company spokesman stated that there were no big jobs in sight and that the prospect did not look good as some of the Company's competitors were getting rid of their stock at "sacrifice prices". He also noted that southern competitors paid workers 25% less than the Vermont Marble Company. Despite this gloomy forecast he cited data showing that from 1 May to 30 September of 1935, the average weekly earnings were more than the corresponding months of the previous year.<sup>2</sup> With a payroll which totaled \$80,000 per month and with no imminent large projects the Company was faced with a decision of either laying off 25% of its workforce at the Danby quarry or putting all of them on a staggered schedule so that a man would work for three consecutive weeks then have each fourth week off. The managers of the Company chose the latter because with this option they would not have to lay off anybody and notified the men of this action.<sup>3</sup> On 16 October 1935, the workers at the Danby quarry voted to go on strike.

Since September 1934, the International Quarrymen's Union of North America had been attempting, to no avail, to get a signed

agreement that included a higher minimum wage, recognition of seniority rights, and a forty-hour workweek. On 3 November, against the advice of Eugene Pederson, the president of the West Rutland Quarry Workers' union, to defer action, the Company's union workers met at the West Rutland Town Hall and agreed that workers would take a "holiday" from work on the following day. They did so to support the Danby strikers and to protest the Company's unwillingness to meet the union's demands during negotiations. This "holiday", however, was not sanctioned by the union but was an independent move by the workers. The Company stated they could not meet the Union's demands because they had been operating at a loss for the last few years.<sup>4</sup>

The first day of the holiday, 4 November 1935, foretold of what was to come in the next eight months. At 8:00 a.m. a truck driver arrived at the West Rutland quarry to take a load of lime to New York State. Upon approaching the plant his truck was stopped by striking workers who persuaded the driver to turn his truck around and not load it. An hour later three more trucks approached and once again these were stopped. Roy Spear, owner of the vehicles, was in the lead truck. As the trucks stopped, Spear came out of the cab armed with a machine gun. Even though he did not point it at the strikers it was meant to intimidate them. Spear and the strikers argued, then one of the strikers tore the gun out of Spear's hands, emptied its cartridges onto the ground, and handed the weapon back to its owner. Spear promptly turned his trucks around and later stated that he would not cross the picket line.<sup>5</sup> Later that day a stone-hurling crowd damaged two nonunion men's cars as they drove through the picket lines in West Rutland.<sup>6</sup> For protection against such attacks, it became customary for some of the nonunion workers to arm themselves with axe handles.

By 9 November, an outside force was at work for the cause. Members of the Communist Party of Rutland City went door to door in West Rutland distributing pamphlets. Some read, "Proctor is working!" "Strike Proctor!" "Picket Proctor!" The Party members praised the workers for their militant action and encouraged them to keep up the good work. The Party further cautioned them not to accept arbitration in a contract because it would make future strikes impossible. One of the pamphlets concluded with this statement: "The communist members in your locals are fighting to win this strike and to make these unions strong."<sup>7</sup>

By the third day of the "holiday" the West Rutland, Danby, Florence, and Center Rutland marble mills and quarries had been shut down. The Florence plant would be reopened when thirty men, under deputy escort, went to work on 7 November and were met by angry



*Union pickets march toward Center Rutland mill to plead with non-union workers.*

strikers who hooted and shouted insults at them.<sup>8</sup> The Proctor plants remained open because only 42 of the 360 men had joined the strike. Fifteen deputies were hired to patrol the grounds there to protect the property and these men.<sup>9</sup>

On 11 November, the “holiday” workers and the union officials met in West Rutland. At a previous meeting long before on 12 February 1935, the workers had voted to strike but the time for calling such an action had been left to a specific committee.<sup>10</sup> President Eugene Pederson, president of the West Rutland Quarrymen’s Union, asked the men to go on an official union sanctioned strike. For the benefit of the non-English-speaking members, his speech was translated into Polish. Upon hearing the news that a strike vote had been passed, the Company immediately mobilized a small army of sheriffs and deputies to protect its property and the non-striking workers. Eight-five officers came from four different counties to provide their services.<sup>11</sup>

Negotiations between the union leaders and company officials failed to bring a resolution. Agreements were reached in regard to seniority rights, means of arbitrating, sanitary conditions and overtime work, but the Company was unwilling to include these in a signed contract since the wage issue had not been resolved. The Union officials offered to work until 1 April at the current wage if the Company agreed to sign the agreement, but the Company declined doing so, arguing that it would not be a “complete contract.”<sup>12</sup>

Failing to get any resolution to the dispute, tensions mounted and frustrated strikers and sympathizers began harassing those who chose to work and to do business with the Company. On 13 November the strikers overtook a truck that had left West Rutland and was headed toward Castleton. They pulled the driver from the cab and damaged the marble that the truck was hauling. They also tried to stop several more trucks, but were dissuaded when sheriffs' deputies arrived on the scene.<sup>13</sup>

The first violent clash occurred on 14 November when a mob estimated at 400 people stopped a Company truck that was transporting marble to Proctor. The strikers, accompanied by four women with brooms, stepped in front of the truck, stopping it on Slason Street in West Rutland. The rioters smashed in the windshield and poured motor oil over the block of marble, thus ruining it. Three carloads of deputies were following the truck and confronted the mob. The deputies scuffled with them for some ten minutes before order was restored. Over ten people were injured, including the head of the sheriffs' protection force, E.H. Schoenfield, who was struck in the face by a rock and hit over the head by a woman who was swinging a broom.<sup>14</sup> Three rioters were arrested and subsequently fined for their actions.<sup>15</sup> Following this brawl Schoenfield made a plea to the strikers to keep women and children off the picket lines, saying, "If they don't keep them out of the crowds, they will have to take their own chances."<sup>16</sup>

A small note on the editorial page of the 25 November *Rutland Herald* reflected sentiments of many people who felt that union leaders could not or were not willing to control the mobs. The editor expressed praise for the deputies who had endured the taunts of the mobs, stating that they had exercised considerable restraint. He also criticized the women, children, and boys and girls of high school age who, he felt, were using the strike as an excuse to commit illegal acts. He felt that these actions served to hurt the cause of the strikers.<sup>17</sup>

Outside influences and shows of support seemed to spur the strikers and their sympathizers to even bolder actions. Louis J. Guilmette, a textile union organizer, exhorted the strikers to "stick to their guns". He challenged them not to be intimidated by the "Proctor machine" and the deputies and "to slap back if they were slapped."<sup>18</sup> Communists encouraged workers to demand more money and to accept no piecework.

During the days that followed it became clear that the strikers and sympathizers intended to target those who had chosen to work. Several homes were stoned during this time. Mr. and Mrs. August Segar escaped injury when rocks were hurled at their home, some of

which landed in the bed in which they were sleeping. Strikers also attacked a car of workers on the Pittsford-Florence road.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most serious attack occurred at the Patrick Kelley home in West Rutland. When Kelley left his house for work on the morning of 20 November, he was booed, hooted and kicked. Officers there to accompany him were treated in the same manner. When he returned to his Main Street house that evening, strikers had already assembled, prepared to resume their abusive tactics. When the deputies ordered the crowd to disperse an argument broke out between some deputies and Pietro DiGangi, a striker. He was arrested and immediately a melee ensued as some 40 deputies beat back the mob with their police sticks. Some demonstrators suffered lacerations that required stitches and a total of seven people were arrested. Those observing the incident later criticized the deputies for what they considered to be "excessive force and vile language." Those arrested were brought into municipal court where they pleaded not guilty to breach of peace charges and were released on \$50 bail each. James R. Gallagher, the president of the Rutland Marble Workers' Union made bail for the seven. Undaunted, a crowd again convened at Kelley's that evening, booing and hooting. This time the deputies rushed them in an effort to get them to disperse. Dennis Oransky (later referred to as Aronski), a rag picker, was hurt in the melee.<sup>20</sup> The following day his picture appeared in the *Rutland Herald*. He lay on a bloodied pillow, his head heavily bandaged.<sup>21</sup>



*Dennis Oransky, a 75-year-old West Rutland rag peddler, lies in bed with a cracked head resting on a blood-stained pillow. He was a bystander who became a victim of the clubs of the deputies.*

Violence and intimidation ruled on 22 November when a crowd of close to a thousand people marched through the streets of West Rutland harassing non-striking workers and smashing windows in their homes. The *Herald* reported that some women and high school girls had organized the march in a show of sympathy for the strikers.<sup>22</sup>



*Women strike sympathizers lead a long line of strikers past deputies guarding the home of Patrick Kelley on Main Street, West Rutland, on 22 November 1935. The house had been stoned the night before.*

Union leaders pleaded with the mob to refrain from throwing stones but they could not control the group. On that same day sheriffs were stoned while escorting John Goldock to his home.<sup>23</sup>

At this point 588 men were on strike. Francis P. Fenton, a representative of the New England American Federation of Labor challenged strikers to stick to their guns and told them that they should not be afraid of being discriminated against when the strike was over. He told them that if they quit, they would be “doomed to slavery.”<sup>24</sup>

But certainly one could understand the concern that these strikers must have had as winter descended on them. Those who continued to work were guaranteed that the Company would once again offer a rent allowance for December through March in order to help workers meet fuel and extra winter costs, but this offer was good only if the worker was employed the week of 15 – 21 November and if he was in good standing.<sup>25</sup>

On Thanksgiving, 28 November, the strikers marched through the streets of Proctor, perhaps in part to express their disdain for the Company’s overtures to help those men still on the payrolls. But this



was not a violent mob. They marched to show their solidarity in the town where the Company had its headquarters and where the union had not succeeded in shutting down the plant. Seventy-five cars and some 300 marchers paraded in the pouring rain carrying picket signs, some of which read: "Raise our pay and we'll pay our rent" and "Turkey for deputies, bread and water for the workers". The caravan of strikers and sympathizers shouted insults as they passed the house of the president of the Company, Mr. Redfield Proctor. While this demonstration was marked with no violence or damage, that morning 100 people had stoned five nonunion workers' homes on Barrett Hill in Center Rutland.<sup>26</sup>

More attacks occurred on the following day. Rock throwing mobs visited nonunion members' homes and smashed several windows. It was reported that a mob returned to Barrett Hill and smashed new glass that had just been installed. Pressure was being placed on workers to join the strike. Joseph Dulski of West Rutland was the subject of such attacks and had made plans to move to Proctor where he was employed. Pressured by strikers' actions against him, he decided to join the union and remain in West Rutland.<sup>27</sup>

In response to this violence several Proctor citizens formed a volunteer home guard to protect the property of Proctor residents. The guard was headed by nine citizens who assumed responsibility for assembling people in their neighborhoods to respond to any outside interference.<sup>28</sup> Town officials established a special call for the fire alarm system. Three blasts followed by three more would signal a call for all neighborhood groups to assemble. Hoping to avoid the Thanksgiving Day demonstration the Board of Trustees of the Village of Proctor adopted an ordinance that prohibited parades without the board's permission. Up to this point in the strike, some 24 homes and 17 automobiles in Center Rutland and West Rutland had been vandalized by mobs and it was clear that the citizens of Proctor had no intention of falling victim to such attacks.<sup>29</sup> The *Rutland Herald* called it a "vigilante force". Whether the group was effective or not cannot be determined but Proctor never experienced any of the violence and destruction that the other towns felt. Wallace Fay, a company executive, best expressed the Proctorian view in a letter to the *Herald* when he stated that the people of Proctor did not intend "to welcome without opposition, the rule of outside mob violence in the Village of Proctor."<sup>30</sup>

While Proctor remained free of violence and damage, fighting and unrest continued to stalk West Rutland and Center Rutland. Three deputies were injured in a riot on Barrett Hill that involved over 40 strikers and 9 deputies. The fracas started when strikers threw stones



*Deputies escort four non-union workers on their way home through the picket lines at Barrett Hill before a bloody riot broke loose.*



*Strikers rush to a new point of vantage during the battle.*



*Riot action in full swing. Pickets dash across field to aid fellow union members who were not faring so well at the moment.*



*A wild scene halted when deputies pulled guns. Deputy Ernest Brouillard of St. Johnsbury, third from left, holds his gun in readiness. Brouillard was bleeding from a head wound. The deputy at his right stands ready to draw the gun from his holster.*

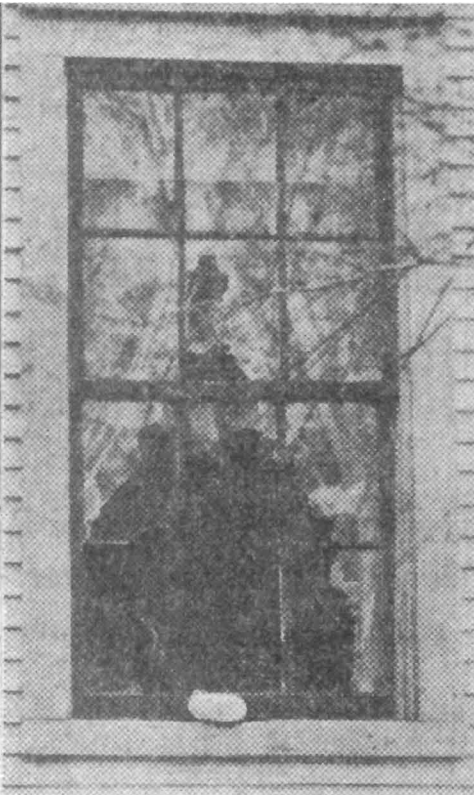
at four non-union workers who were returning home from work. Both sides attacked each other with clubs and the violence only stopped when deputies drew their guns in order to stop the beating of a fellow officer.<sup>31</sup>

While strikers were taking a militant attitude in these two towns and doing little to arouse the sympathy and understanding of the public, Danby strikers' families were the focus of attention and concern in the Hanover, New Hampshire community. In early December rumors circulated that the Danby folk were ill fed and ill-clothed. Leon Woodward of the local International Quarry Workers' Association denied that people were starving and lacked proper clothing. He indicated that each family was supplied with wood for fuel and had enough to eat.<sup>32</sup> When some Dartmouth college students and faculty expressed a desire to help, union leaders visited them in Hanover to insure that Communists had no part in this overture before they accepted some relief.<sup>33</sup> An inquiry subsequently revealed that meat and clothing were needed for children and that at least 12 children were being kept out of school because their parents felt that they were not clothed properly. Strike families who sought aid from the Overseer of the Poor, Delos Bromley, had been refused. He reasoned that the strikers did not deserve local aid because they could be employed if they chose to return to work.<sup>34</sup>

Reporters soon concerned themselves with a series of events that gave the strike an even more ugly aspect than the melees that had transpired. On 11 December, strikers were accused of dynamiting a set of tracks used by the Vermont Marble Company-owned Clarendon and

Pittsford Railroad. Also that night six power poles in Proctor and Leicester that carried electricity to several Company plants were destroyed when they were blown up.<sup>35</sup> Sheriff Fred Flint offered a \$100 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.<sup>36</sup> On 12 December strikers were blamed when it was discovered that spikes had been removed from a section of the company-owned tracks in West Rutland. The loosened rail had been turned aside which would have caused a derailment.<sup>37</sup> Attorney General Lawrence C. Jones fired a letter to Governor Smith, requesting him to grant a reward not to exceed \$1000 for the arrest and conviction of any person who destroyed rail property.<sup>38</sup> Uncowed by this action, the strikers continued their destruction as both ends of a railroad bridge spanning the Clarendon River were dynamited.<sup>39</sup>

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*The left picture (above) shows the window of a non-union worker's home. The stone that smashed the glass and sash sits on the sill. Strikers were blamed for dynamiting power poles belonging to the Vermont Marble Company. The picture on the right (above) shows the effect of the dynamite charge on the right pole. The left pole was undamaged. The dynamite fuse can be seen extending from a hole in the pole to the left.*

Meanwhile in Danby, suspicion that Communists were attempting to gain control of the local marble workers' union surfaced. James Falzo, the newly elected president of the International Quarry Workers, was approached by a committee of five men, whom he believed were Communists, with an offer to provide assistance to the strikers. The president turned down the offer, stating that only 15% of his union's 110 members had communistic affiliations.<sup>40</sup>

The New Year brought yet another riot on 3 January 1936, this time near the Delaware and Hudson rail station in West Rutland. Deputies were driving several workmen home while at the same time some marble was being loaded onto gondolas. Two carloads of deputies and a car driven by a company superintendent, Arthur Alwill, were stoned as they left the marble yard. The crowd refused to disperse and the riot erupted after a deputy arrested one of the strikers. Immediately both deputies and strikers were in a pitched battle with their clubs as the primary weapon. Both sides started swinging them. The melee was finally ended when one of the deputies threw a canister of tear gas into the crowd. Some strikers fled the scene while others sought refuge in the union hall. When the smoke disappeared, it was revealed that twelve deputies and five strikers had been injured in the incident. Observers reported that the snow around the station was spattered with blood.<sup>41</sup> One injured Pole remarked from his bed in the hospital that, "For 37 years, I work, work, work. Never do I fight; never do I get in jail. Now look, I think, and I think and I think. And it hurts even to think. Maybe I think too much."<sup>42</sup>

As the strike evolved and people read about the destruction and violence that became all too familiar copy for the paper, some wondered what role the state and federal governments would play in the strike. Charles Johnson Post, Commissioner of Conciliation in the Department of Labor, was sent to observe the strike but not to act as an arbitrator.<sup>43</sup> Mere observation would do little to effect a conclusion. Strike leaders appealed to the federal government by sending telegrams to President Franklin Roosevelt, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, Secretary of War George Dern, and Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins. While the telegrams were sent to each individual, the message was essentially the same: the Vermont Marble Company doesn't pay its men well so do not award it any more contracts. Such a suggestion seems irrational when one considers that it was the lack of jobs and a subsequent cutback on hours that had precipitated the strike. Hopkins' telegram informed him that some company officials were also town officials who were discriminating against strikers in regard to relief.<sup>44</sup> The federal government was silent.

Francis B. Fenton, the New England representative of the American Federation of Labor, announced that he intended to file a petition with Region 1 of the National Labor Relations Board, charging the Company with refusing to bargain with its employees. He further planned to appeal to the Company "in the name of common decency" to have its officials removed from relief committees in the strike towns.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly there might have been some basis to these charges because in early January, Orin A. Thomas and John F. Dwyer were in court to respond to charges of failing to assist five Center Rutland school children that were in need of clothing to attend school. Parents reported that their children were being kept home because they lacked appropriate clothes and in particular, rubbers and shoes.<sup>46</sup> Dwyer, a foreman and Rutland Town selectman, was found guilty of "willful neglect of his duty"<sup>47</sup> and on 28 January he was fined \$60.00 as well as \$20.87 for court costs.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps John C. Lawson of Barre, the secretary-treasurer of the International Quarrymen's Union, was referring to this type of behavior when he remarked that, "We hear much about the great spirit of Vermont. Well, it is the spirit of Vermont that we're fighting against now. The Vermont Marble Company is showing the spirit of Vermont."<sup>49</sup> Like the *Rutland Herald* headline of 1 January 1936, which read "1936 Starts Off Bravely" Lawson was ready to take on all giants on behalf of what FDR termed "the forgotten man".

Eyes were on the Governor to do something about a strike that was now in its fourth month and he finally sent Clarence R. White, Commissioner of Industries, to interview both sides and to report his findings to him. This time a state official was being sent to investigate but not to act in the capacity of an arbitrator.<sup>50</sup> Rumors began to spread that the Governor was going to appoint a board of arbitration,<sup>51</sup> but the Governor had no comment in this regard.<sup>52</sup>

White's report would not be made public in its entirety but excerpts revealed that he recommended that the Company review its financial situation and consider giving a pay raise. He also noted that there could be "no true arbitration" unless both sides submitted voluntarily to the process. In concluding his report he observed that Vermonters were living in troublesome times and that everyone should practice patience and charity and both the unions and company representatives should work it out like friends.<sup>53</sup>

So this, anything but friendly strike, continued with each side as intractable as ever. The Company reported that toward the end of January 811 men were working. Sixty-eight percent of the number represented the labor force that had been on duty prior to the strike.

According to the Company these men were receiving average weekly paychecks of \$19 a week.<sup>54</sup>

The state, whose Governor refused to get involved in the settlement of the strike, had quite a bill for their part in keeping order in Rutland County. It was reported in late January that more than \$7,000 had been spent for deputies since the strike's inception. The state that once had shouldered the entire bill was now paying for 30 officers while the Company paid for the rest.<sup>55</sup>

If the strikers could solicit no help from the Governor in the settlement of the dispute, it placed its hopes on a New York committee called "the united committee to aid Vermont marble workers" which was headed by Rockwell Kent, a noted writer, illustrator, and Socialist. The committee arrived in West Rutland to hold hearings on the strike in order to promote and publicize the workers' plight. In addition to this fifteen-member delegation, observers came from several colleges including Dartmouth and Bennington. Perry Shostac, one of the heads of the committee, explained to the assembly that they did not intend to keep the strike a local issue as the Company wished to do. Plans, he said, were being made to have a half dozen strikers picket the Company's office on 101 Park Avenue in New York City. In addition it intended to communicate with various federal agencies to inform them of what was transpiring. Two New York attorneys, I.S. Pelier and Sidney Cohen, questioned labor leaders, strikers and even strikers' wives as 800 people crowded into the Town Hall to hear these testimonies. A summary of their findings was given to the press and a complete report was forwarded to the Governor. They also requested that the Governor provide state relief for the strikers, that he withdraw all state-employed deputies, and that he offer his services as conciliator in the dispute. One of the findings questioned the Company's ability to pay workers an increase. The committee asserted that the Company had paid 5% on its preferred stock and 15% on its common stock and that its assets amounted to \$11,203,276.00 against liabilities of \$119,043.00.<sup>56</sup> The Company responded by denying the accuracy of these figures.<sup>57</sup>

Shortly after the findings were published the strikers got some attention in the U.S. House of Representatives when a New York representative attacked the Company, claiming that it had \$5,000,000 worth of government contracts but was refusing to give its workers a decent wage.<sup>58</sup> This allegation prompted yet another Company response. An official revealed that the Company had less than \$35,000 of business directly with the federal government and indirectly as a subcontractor had under \$200,000 of business. He charged that strike

leaders and "their out-of-state friends were misleading both the strikers and the public."<sup>59</sup>

In mid-March Governor Smith finally took some action by organizing a meeting of state officials, Vermont Marble Company officials, and union representatives at the Marble Savings Bank in Rutland.<sup>60</sup> This session brought hope to many as strikers agreed to back off their demand for a 25% pay increase if the Company agreed to allow a Governor-appointed certified public accountant examine the Company's books and if his findings revealed that the Company's operating expenses were higher than its income.<sup>61</sup>

Within two weeks of the conference the Company agreed to an examination of its books to show its losses in 1934 and in 1935 if the union agreed to stop its demand for a wage increase and to stop the strike, but the Company made it clear it had no intention of signing an agreement at that time. It also indicated that it would not discriminate in the rehiring of strikers and that it would hold off its proposed evictions until the books had been examined.<sup>62</sup>

The union leaders' retort to the Company statement was adamant. The men would not return to work without a signed contract.<sup>63</sup> While this response echoed the sentiments of the leaders it apparently did not reflect the opinion of many strikers because approximately 40 men reported to the Company's office to request that they be allowed to return to their jobs. Many who wished to go back to work feared when and if they were to do so that there would be reprisals against them by those who remained out on strike. Many were concerned that their homes would become targets for strikers' stones. It is not known how many men were rehired, but the Company publicly stated that it would not dismiss any worker in their employ in order to accommodate the return of the strikers.<sup>64</sup> This statement must have caused many strikers to consider the possibility that there might not be a job for them when the situation got resolved. In late April strikers again got some more disturbing news when *Herald* headlines indicated that some strikers might have forfeited their pension plans if they had not paid their monthly premiums for the previous six months.<sup>65</sup>

One of the last acts of bloodshed that occurred during the strike happened on 2 March when Halford Johnson, John DeSaint, Zigmont Kantorski, Steve Czachor and Paul Yascot attacked non-striker Carl Peterson of Baxter Street, Rutland, who at the time of the attack was walking home from work. His five attackers beat him severely with their fists and used pipes, bottles, stones and their feet to inflict further damage.<sup>66</sup> The pre-trial activities drew as much attention as the trial itself because State Attorney General Lawrence C. Jones



announced that he would prosecute the case. This decision brought criticism from labor leaders as well as Attorney Asa Bloomer who felt it was illegal to have Jones assume jurisdiction of his court. The State Supreme Court held that it was not illegal and Jones presented the case.<sup>67</sup> The five men were convicted and sentenced to serve between one and two years in the state prison in Windsor.<sup>68</sup> The hostility caused by the strike had resulted in five hardworking men going to jail.

Other once hardworking men faced grim news some three months after the strike had begun when the Company sent letters to 186 strikers who lived in Company-owned tenements, stating that they had to vacate their homes by 1 April because they had not paid any rent, electrical light or water bills since the strike had begun.<sup>69</sup> As the first of April approached it became apparent many renters intended to draw a line in the sand and were determined to remain in their homes until officials dragged them and their belongings from the rentals.<sup>70</sup>

While the Company was losing its patience with the strikers, it was obvious that officials intended to continue good working relations with those who were in their employ. A Company spokesman announced that as in the previous spring, it would designate \$6,000 for fertilizer, plants, and seeds for faithful workers' gardens.<sup>71</sup> It was obvious that the Company wanted to reward loyalty and punish those who dared to protest their working conditions.

Terrorist actions resumed in April as power lines leading to the Danby quarry were dynamited twice<sup>72</sup> and a power plant at the West Rutland quarry had a fire although the local fire chief indicated that the blaze was the result of a short circuit in the wiring.<sup>73</sup> The Danby Imperial quarry was probably a target of strikers because 16 employees had gone back to work the day before the first dynamiting and it was reported that more were scheduled to go back "in the hole" within a short time.<sup>74</sup> With this new round of violence the State Attorney General's office offered a reward of \$500 for information leading to the arrest of the responsible parties.<sup>75</sup>

The union leaders clearly were losing their grip on the men. In late April a contingent of West Rutland strikers met with Attorney General Jones and presented him a petition signed by 24 men who desired to return to work but sought protection as they had been threatened with violence if they quit the strike. A group of Center Rutland workers, also seeking to return to their jobs, were fearful of reprisals if and when they deserted the union cause.<sup>76</sup>

By early May the Ripley and Clement Mills in Center Rutland were open except for the finishing shop. Work normally done in that shop

was shipped to the shop in Proctor. In mid May many quarry workers in West Rutland went back on the job as well.<sup>77</sup>

Those still on strike received support from the national executive committee of the Socialist Party who depicted the management of the Company as "irresponsible and feudalistic." Part of their statement read that, "When strikers are railroaded to prison for a year to two years for a so-called breach of peace, when the state's legal representative vindictively intervenes in local courts, when the combination of newspaper propaganda and public apathy support the desire of the Vermont Marble Company to have the case disappear from public notice, Americans who care for justice should speak out." Wallace Fay, public relations official for the Company remarked that, "the resolution is obviously based on an inadequate knowledge of the situation."<sup>78</sup>

In early June, Company officials announced that the strike was a failure. They asserted that radical elements had used the strike to promote selfish motives and reported that their pay roll for the past week had been only 122 fewer employees than prior to the walkout. Further, they again indicated that no present employee would be dismissed in order that strikers could reclaim their jobs.<sup>79</sup> The union responded to this claim by saying that the Company was trying to win the public's sympathy. Labor leaders questioned, why, if as the Company indicated, it had few positions available, were some the "their petty officials" attempting to "entice strikers to return to work?" They asserted that these Company men were trying to encourage men to return to the shops and quarries because the "inexperienced, incompetent, unskilled" replacements could not do the jobs vacated by the strikers.<sup>80</sup>

Both groups claimed that their side was winning but those who were neither striker nor worker were fed up with the strike and all that accompanied it. West Rutland had literally been an occupied area since the strike's inception and citizens wanted the deputies removed from the Town. Rather than protect citizens, Westsiders felt that the presence of deputies created "a public nuisance and menace to the well-being and happiness of the great majority of the citizenry."<sup>81</sup> They also complained that deputies should remain on Company grounds that they were hired to guard and not patrol outside of those boundaries.<sup>82</sup>

Center Rutland residents were also disgusted with the behavior of the strikers, claiming they were recipients of "insults and abuses" from them. Fifty-four people signed a petition asking the Company to remove strikers from Company-owned homes.<sup>83</sup> It became clear that

the Company planned to carry out a number of evictions and in early June it began to file suits against strikers.<sup>84</sup>

As the Company began the process of acquiring writs to remove strikers from their homes, plans were made to accommodate those who would be displaced. West Rutland officials announced that they would furnish tenements to the homeless.<sup>85</sup> Prior to evicting these families the Company removed light meters from the rentals so that by the first of July some 57 homes were without electricity.<sup>86</sup> Everyone understood that there were simply not enough empty homes to accommodate these numbers. Strikers and their families must have been terrified at the prospect of being evicted.

Other forces were at work to resolve the strike and fortunately were successful in bringing it to a conclusion. On 26 July 1936, the strike was ended with the help of federal mediator Fred C. Craxton who had met with representatives from both sides over a period for several weeks. It was agreed that Craxton would release the terms of the agreement and speak for both sides. He reported that at a mass meeting lasting approximately three and one-half hours, 86% of the strikers agreed to terms and voted to end the dispute. The company at the time of the settlement had all of its mills and quarries in operation and employed over 1000 men.

The terms of the settlement were as follows:

1. The Company agreed to take the men back as they were needed. No replacement workers would be laid off and they would not discriminate in regard to union affiliation.
2. There would be no increase in wages except for the two and a half cent raise that was put into effect in April.
3. Men living in Company houses could stay as long as they paid the rent and made arrangements to pay all back rent and utility bills within one year.

Craxton released a statement, part of which read: "...This prolonged strike has meant a heavy loss to the men involved, to the company and to the community. The terms of the settlement do not mean a victory for either side but do represent concessions by both groups involved.... The welfare of the community calls for the heartiest cooperation from everyone in wiping out neighborhood disagreements which may have arisen during the strike and also in encouraging men who have been on strike to work shoulder to shoulder as before."<sup>87</sup>

The bitter, protracted strike was now over and there began the task of attempting to mend fences between management and labor, between neighbor and neighbor, and between town and town. Some damage was

irreparable as hostile feelings could not be put aside and some simply refused to forget the treatment they had received during the strike. Concern now was on finding a job. Some men were rehired while others sought employment elsewhere. There are no statistics currently available that reveal how many men were reemployed. It is certain however that all of them were glad that the strike was over.

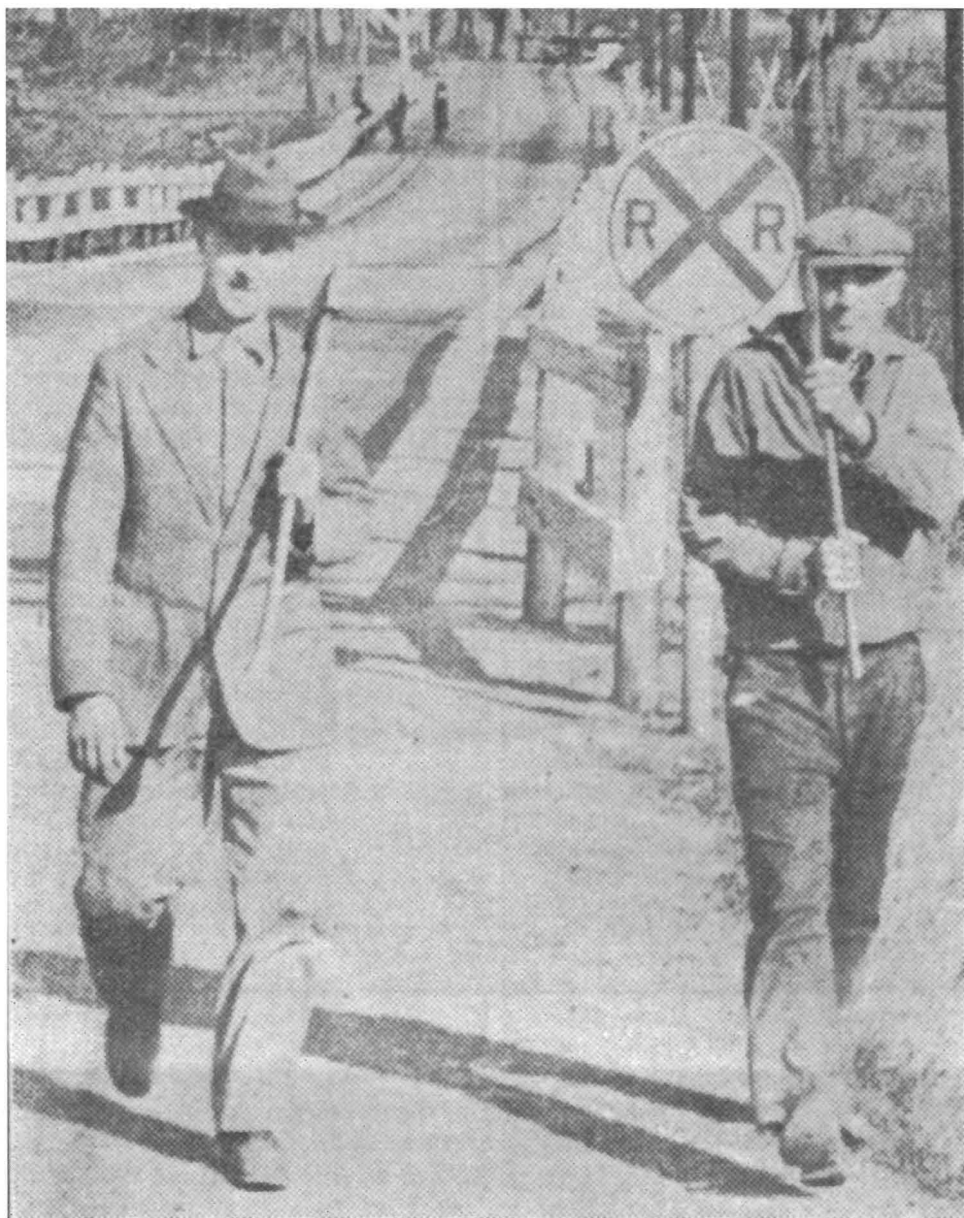
## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Vermont Marble Co. Issues Statement," *Rutland Herald*, 21 December 1935.
- <sup>2</sup> "No Payroll Boost, Says Marble Company," *Rutland Herald*, 18 October 1935.
- <sup>3</sup> "Vermont Marble Company Issues Statement," *Rutland Herald*, 21 December 1935.
- <sup>4</sup> "'Holiday' Voted By Marble Workers, Affects Over 900," *Rutland Herald*, 4 November 1935.
- <sup>5</sup> The municipal court judge fined Spear five dollars for brandishing his gun. "Marble Workers Restless On Eve of Wage Meeting," *Rutland Herald*, 6 November 1935.
- <sup>6</sup> "Machine Gun Fails To Cow Marble Workers," *Rutland Herald*, 5 November 1935.
- <sup>7</sup> "Marble Men On Strike, 85 Sheriffs Mobilize," *Rutland Herald*, 12 November 1935.
- <sup>8</sup> "Marble Plant At Florence Reopens," *Rutland Herald*, 8 November 1935.
- <sup>9</sup> "Marble Confab To Be Renewed If Men Behave," *Rutland Herald*, 7 November 1935.
- <sup>10</sup> "'Holiday' Voted By Marble Workers, Affects Over 900," *Rutland Herald*, 4 November 1935.
- <sup>11</sup> "Marble Men On Strike, 85 Sheriffs Mobilize," *Rutland Herald*, 12 November 1935.
- <sup>12</sup> "Union Officials Plan Relief For Strike Families," *Rutland Herald*, 13 November 1935.
- <sup>13</sup> "Violence Flares As Unrest Grows In Strike Area," *Rutland Herald*, 14 November 1935.
- <sup>14</sup> "Sheriff Schoenfeld Hurt As Women Lead Strike In West Rutland," *Rutland Herald*, 15 November 1935.
- <sup>15</sup> Those arrested were Steve Firliet, Perle West and Ornufrý Baron. All of them pleaded "nolo contendere" to breach of peace charges and were fined \$5.00 plus costs of \$8.30 each.
- <sup>16</sup> "Strikers Are Warned To Keep Women, Children Out of Mobs," *Rutland Herald*, 15 November 1935.
- <sup>17</sup> "More Harm than Good," *Rutland Herald*, 25 November 1935.
- <sup>18</sup> "Marble Strikers Urged To Stick To Their Guns," *Rutland Herald*, 16 November 1935.

- <sup>19</sup> "Strikers Blamed For Stoning Home," *Rutland Herald*, 21 November 1935.
- <sup>20</sup> Aronski would sue the Vermont Marble Company for \$10,000, claiming that he sustained permanent brain damage as a result of the 21 November incident. However, he would lose his case. See "Deputy Testifies in Aronski Case," *Rutland Herald*, 8 April 1936 and "Directed Verdict Favors Marble Co.," *Rutland Herald*, 9 April 1936.
- <sup>21</sup> "Deputies Crack Strikers' Heads," *Rutland Herald*, 22 November 1935.
- <sup>22</sup> "1000 Strike Sympathizers Stage Near Riot, Stoning Three Homes," *Rutland Herald*, 23 November 1935.
- <sup>23</sup> "Sheriffs Stoned After Escorting Worker Home," *Rutland Herald*, 23 November 1935.
- <sup>24</sup> "Strikers Restless As Nonunion Men Continue To Work," *Rutland Herald*, 27 November 1935.
- <sup>25</sup> "Marble Co. To Help Workers Pay Rent," *Rutland Herald*, 27 November 1935.
- <sup>26</sup> "1000 Strikers And Friends Parade As Rain Pours Down," *Rutland Herald*, 29 November 1935. Before six deputies arrived to restore order all of the glass in the front windows of the homes of R. Olsen, A. Hector, E. Nelson, H. Johnson and A. Holmquist had been destroyed.
- <sup>27</sup> "Strike Area Windows Smashed By Rowdies," *Rutland Herald*, 30 November 1935.
- <sup>28</sup> D.W. McGarry was in charge of the west side of town and the area from Cross Street to Cain Street and Beaver Pond. Oscar Johnson was responsible for the Garden of Eden. Powers Hill, Meadow, Elm and Willow Streets and the Gorham Bridge Road were the responsibility of John Brolin. Edward Olsen headed the North Street, Market Street and Terrace Hill areas as far as Powers Hill and the Garden of Eden. Ernest Reynolds was put in charge of School Street and all areas from Gibbs Street to Main Street. Jerry Yirak assumed responsibility for Gibbs Street, Taylor Hill and Bluff Street. On the south side of town, Severus Westin headed up the group for South Street and the area from the baseball field to Otter Creek and north to the Marble Bridge. S.C. Thomas took control of Olympus Road from W. Fay's home east including Ormsbee and Warner Avenues and from B. Williams to Oak Street. John Dynan, Jr., headed up the contingent that was responsible for the Patch Hill area from the library to the town line.
- <sup>29</sup> "Vigilantes For Proctor," *Rutland Herald*, 2 December 1935.
- <sup>30</sup> "An Explanation," *Rutland Herald*, 5 December 1935.
- <sup>31</sup> "Strikers In Bloody Fray," *Rutland Herald*, 4 December 1935.
- <sup>32</sup> "Danby Folk Not Hungry," *Rutland Herald*, 6 December 1935.
- <sup>33</sup> "Unions To Accept Hanover Relief," *Rutland Herald*, 7 December 1935.
- <sup>34</sup> "Inquiry Disclosed Danby Children Need Clothing," *Rutland Herald*, 9 December 1935.
- <sup>35</sup> "Dynamite Wrecks Marble R. R. Tracks," *Rutland Herald*, 12 December 1935.
- <sup>36</sup> "Sheriff Offers Reward," *Rutland Herald*, 12 December 1935.
- <sup>37</sup> "R. R. Periled By Sabotage," *Rutland Herald*, 13 December 1935.

- <sup>38</sup> "Jones Asks Strike Action," *Rutland Herald*, 14 December 1935.
- <sup>39</sup> "Blasts Wreck Railroad Bridge At Wells Flats," *Rutland Herald*, 17 December 1935.
- <sup>40</sup> "Communists Try To Grab Union Control," *Rutland Herald*, 19 December 1935.
- <sup>41</sup> "Melee, 5 Men In Hospital," *Rutland Herald*, 8 January 1936.
- <sup>42</sup> "Melee, 5 Men In Hospital," *Rutland Herald*, 8 January 1936. Under arrest in the hospital were William Godek, Stanley Sankoski, Leo Librizzi, Vincent Drzewiceuski, and Joseph Machewski. In jail were John Nieniertowicz, Adam Czachor, Joseph Markwica and Walter Cecot.
- <sup>43</sup> "Government Takes Hand In Strike; Sends Observer," *Rutland Herald*, 18 December 1935.
- <sup>44</sup> "Strikers Send Appeal To F.D.; Wagner Act Petition," *Rutland Herald*, 20 December 1935.
- <sup>45</sup> "Strikers Send Appeal To F.D.; Wagner Act Petition," *Rutland Herald*, 20 December 1935. Company officials mentioned who also served on relief boards included Allen Davis of West Rutland, John Dwyer of Center Rutland and N.C. Peterson of Proctor.
- <sup>46</sup> "Selectmen Held When Pupils Lack Clothing," *Rutland Herald*, 7 January 1936.
- <sup>47</sup> "Selectman Guilty of Refusing Relief," *Rutland Herald*, 13 January 1936.
- <sup>48</sup> "Dwyer Fined For Neglecting Duty," *Rutland Herald*, 29 January 1936.
- <sup>49</sup> "Strikers Send Appeal To F.D.; Wagner Act Petition," *Rutland Herald*, 20 December 1935.
- <sup>50</sup> "Governor Sends Envoy To Probe Strike Situation," *Rutland Herald*, 10 January 1936.
- <sup>51</sup> "There's A Rumor Of Strike Arbitration," *Rutland Herald*, 10 January 1936.
- <sup>52</sup> "Governor Silent On Strike Arbitration," *Rutland Herald*, 18 January 1936.
- <sup>53</sup> "White Intimates Marble Co. Should Consider Pay Raise," *Rutland Herald*, 27 January 1936.
- <sup>54</sup> "811 Now Employed By Marble Company," *Rutland Herald*, 23 January 1936.
- <sup>55</sup> "Marble Strike Has Cost State More Than \$7000," *Rutland Herald*, 24 January 1936.
- <sup>56</sup> "N.Y. Committee Studies Marble Strike Situation," *Rutland Herald*, 2 March 1936.
- <sup>57</sup> "Marble Co. Brands Finding Untrue," *Rutland Herald*, 3 March 1936.
- <sup>58</sup> "Vermont Marble Co. Bitterly Assailed On Floor of House," *Rutland Herald*, 12 March 1936.
- <sup>59</sup> "The Marble Situation," *Rutland Herald*, 8 April 1936.
- <sup>60</sup> "Gov. Smith Calls Strike Parley In Surprise Move," *Rutland Herald*, 18 March 1936.
- <sup>61</sup> "End Of Strike Is Seen," *Rutland Herald*, 19 March 1936.
- <sup>62</sup> "Marble Company Yields Point To Strikers," *Rutland Herald*, 31 March 1936.
- <sup>63</sup> "Strikers Cool To Marble Co. Terms," *Rutland Herald*, 1 April 1936.

- <sup>64</sup> "Marble Company Ends Parleying With Strikers," *Rutland Herald*, 11 April 1936.
- <sup>65</sup> "Marble Strikers May Lose Pensions," *Rutland Herald*, 30 April 1936.
- <sup>66</sup> "Worker Terribly Beaten By Mob Of Marble Strikers," *Rutland Herald*, 3 March 1936. Romeo Loso, another non-striker, was with Peterson at the time but escaped the mob and suffered no injury. Carl Peterson would recover from this beating and retire after 38 years of service in July of 1962.
- <sup>67</sup> "Case of Riotous Strikers Results In Controversy," *Rutland Herald*, 20 April 1936; "Jones' Action In Strike Cases Is Termed Unlawful," *Rutland Herald*, 23 April 1936; "Judge Over-Rules Motion To Halt Strikers' Trial," *Rutland Herald*, 24 April 1936.
- <sup>68</sup> "Five Strikers Get Prison Terms, Go To Windsor Today," *Rutland Herald*, 28 April 1936.
- <sup>69</sup> "Strikers Told To Vacate Dwellings By First of April," *Rutland Herald*, 21 February 1936.
- <sup>70</sup> "Trouble Predicted When Marble Co. Starts Evictions," *Rutland Herald*, 16 March 1936.
- <sup>71</sup> "Marble Co. Plans Garden Program," *Rutland Herald*, 27 March 1936.
- <sup>72</sup> "Marble Company Power Lines At Danby Blown Up," *Rutland Herald*, 17 April 1936; "Power Lines To Danby Quarries Again Blown Up," *Rutland Herald*, 20 April 1936.
- <sup>73</sup> "Westside Quarry's Power Plant Burned," *Rutland Herald*, 18 April 1936.
- <sup>74</sup> "Marble Company Power Lines At Danby Blown Up," *Rutland Herald*, 17 April 1936.
- <sup>75</sup> "State Offers \$500 For Capture Of Strike Terrorists," *Rutland Herald*, 22 April 1936.
- <sup>76</sup> "Strikers, Eager To Resume Work, Ask Protection," *Rutland Herald*, 27 April 1936.
- <sup>77</sup> "Marble Workers Resume Posts At Westside Quarries," *Rutland Herald*, 16 May 1936.
- <sup>78</sup> "Both Marble Co., Attorney General Hit By Socialists," *Rutland Herald*, 28 May 1936.
- <sup>79</sup> "Marble Company Brands Long Strike A Failure," *Rutland Herald*, 9 June 1936.
- <sup>80</sup> "Union Heads Deny Strike Is A Failure," *Rutland Herald*, 10 June 1936.
- <sup>81</sup> "Westsidiers Want Deputies Removed," *Rutland Herald*, 10 June 1936.
- <sup>82</sup> "Westsidiers Score Deputies Conduct," *Rutland Herald*, 18 June 1936.
- <sup>83</sup> "Marble Co. Urged To Oust Strikers," *Rutland Herald*, 11 June 1936.
- <sup>84</sup> "Ejectment Suits Filed Against 5 Marble Strikers," *Rutland Herald*, 16 June 1936.
- <sup>85</sup> "W. Rutland Will House Strikers," *Rutland Herald*, 29 June 1936.
- <sup>86</sup> "Strikers Light Meters Removed," *Rutland Herald*, 2 July 1936.
- <sup>87</sup> "Marble Strike Ends, Company and Men Sign," *Rutland Herald*, 27 July 1936.



*William Mazon (left) and Steve Czachor (right) of Center Rutland carry axes to protect themselves from union pickets.*

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